

Thomas Jefferson to Hugh Williamson, January 10, 1801, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO DR. HUGH WILLIAMSON J. MSS.

Washington, Jan 10, 1801.

Dear Sir, —I should sooner have acknowledged your favor of December 8th, but for a growing and pressing correspondence which I can scarcely manage. I was particularly happy to receive the diary of Quebec, as about the same time I happened to receive one from the Natchez, so as to be able to make a comparison of them. The result was a wonder that any human being should remain in a cold country who could find room in a warm one, should prefer —32° to —55°. Harry Hill has told me that the temperature of Madeira is generally from 55° to 65°, it's extreme about 50° to 70°. If I ever change my climate for health, it should be for that island. I do not know that the coincidence has ever been remarked between the new moon and greater degrees of cold, or the full moon and the lesser degrees; or that the reflected beams of the moon attemper the weather at all. On the contrary, I think I have understood that the most powerful concave mirror presented to the moon, and throwing its focus on the bulb of a thermometer, does not in the least affect it. I suppose the opinion to be universal that the turkey is a native of America. Nobody, as far as I know, has ever contradicted it but Daines Barrington; and the arguments he produces are such as none but a head, entangled & kinked as his is, would ever have urged. Before the discovery of America, no such bird is mentioned in a single author, all those quoted by Barrington, by description referring to the crane, hen, pheasant or peacock; but the book of every traveller, who came to America soon after it's discovery,

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is full of accounts of the turkey and it's abundance; and immediately after that discovery we find the turkey served up at the feasts of Europe, as their most extraordinary rarity. Mr. William Strickland, the eldest son of St. George Strickland, of York, in England, told me the anecdote. Some ancestor of his commanded a vessel in the navigations of Cabot. Having occasion to consult the Herald's office concerning

his family, he found a petition from that ancestor to the crown, stating that Cabot's circumstances being slender, he had been rewarded by the bounties he needed from the crown; that as to himself, he asked nothing in that way, but that as a consideration for his services in the same way, he might be permitted to assume for the crest of his family arms, the turkey, an American bird; and Mr. Strickland observed that their crest is actually a turkey. You ask whether we may be quoted. In the first place, I now state the thing from memory, and may be inexact in some small circumstances. Mr. Strickland too, stated it to me in a conversation, and not considering it of importance, might be inexact too. We should both dislike to be questioned before the public for any little inaccuracy of style or recollection. I think if you were to say that the Herald's office may be referred to in proof of the fact, it would be authority sufficient, without naming us. I have at home a note of Mr. Strickland's information, which I then committed to paper. My situation does not allow me to refresh my memory from this. I shall be glad to see your book make its appearance; and I am sure it will be well received by the Philosophical part of the world, for I still dare to use the word philosophy, notwithstanding the war waged against it by bigotry & despotism. Health, respect and friendly salutations.